



ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE PROTECTION OF ENVIRONMENT, IN RURAL KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT

This paper deal with Role of Local Government in the protection of environment The local Government is a type of democratic decentralization where the cooperation of even the grass root level of the society is ensured during administration In the recent years local government and non-government organisations has been a subject of extraordinary arrangement of social research and assessment with regards to improvement being looked through a procedure of decentralization of political power at the grass root level. After the enactment of 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution it appropriate to deliberate on the barriers and the way forward in shaping up effective environmental governance at the local level involving the Panchayat Raj Institutions. The Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act 1993, was passed and established a three tier elected structure-Zilla Panchayat (district level) Taluka Panchayat (block level) and Gram Panchayat (village level) Among the 29 subjects mentioned in the Eleventh Schedule, land improvement, land consolidation, soil conservation, water management, social forestry, minor forest produce, non-conventional energy sources, sanitation, and maintenance of assets, are subjects related to environmental management. Among different levels of environmental administration, the most effective is the local level for efficient management and utilization of natural resources. After the enactment of 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution it appropriate to deliberate on the barriers and the way forward in shaping up effective environmental governance at the local level involving the Panchayat Raj Institutions. This research paper has been made in an analytical and descriptive method by analysing secondary data.

KEY WORDS: Environment, Local Government, Duties. Panchayats.

INTRODUCTION:

The Local Self Government is entitled to discharge certain compulsory functions like; supplying safe and clean drinking water, imparting and maintaining proper drainage and sewage systems, providing public street lighting, sanitation and hygiene of public places, public building, roads, culverts and bridges maintenance and issuing licenses for trade activities and also issuing and maintaining birth and death records. Apart from these the local self-government can deliver some discretionary functions including education, health, community and recreation services. Regarding the maintenance of the health either the sanitation or environmental degradation it will bring notice to the related authorities of the government. the environmental issues in the region for the Gram Panchayats arise due to various activities implemented by the Gram Panchayats like over exploitation of ground water, improper sanitation and sewage system, improper solid waste management and also those activities which are implemented at the Gram Panchayat level like mining and quarrying, use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, etc

OBLIGATIONS OF PANCHAYATS:

Karnataka state comprises of 30 districts, 4 revenue divisions and 177 taluks. Geographically the state is situated in a table land. The Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act states that the duty of Gram Panchayat includes earmarking places away from the dwelling houses for dumping refuse and manure. The villages in and around mining areas should be adopted for social, economic and education improvements. Basic infrastructure facilities should be provided for people in and around areas of mining. People in these areas should be given employment; civic facilities like health, education, transport, communication should be given to the villages affected by mining activities. Environmental pollution caused due to mining should be dispensed and environment friendly programmes should be implemented. Measures should be taken to improve ground water level

The environmental dictum, "Think globally and act locally" can be well applied to Village Panchayats. If these Village Panchayats protect their "unreserved forests", there is the likelihood of a change in the appearance of the rural areas. Increase in forest cover would lead to a successive increase in the ground water table, availability of drinking water, wildlife and bird populations. Reserved forests are protected by Forest Departments of every state. But unclassified wastelands and unreserved forests are belong to the Panchayat.

The Panchayats have the authority to evolve a code of conduct and regulations for rearing livestock. Agriculture, also a subject to be dealt with by Panchayats, may be increased by enforcement of certain disciplines in growing crops (native crops). It is all within the jurisdiction of Panchayats.

In addition to these functionaries of Panchayats, there is another effective organ in the form of the village administration - "the Grama Sabha". All voters in the village Panchayat are members of the Grama Sabha of the village. It meets once in a quarter and on other occasions as per the need of the time. The Panchayat President is also the Chairman of the Grama Sabha. All the members participate in the meetings and issues common to the village as a whole are discussed and

conclusions arrived at. It is also a forum where specific issues detrimental to the village are discussed openly. Such meetings can always be used as a platform for infusing environmental conservation practices.

KARNATAKA GRAM SWARAJ PROJECT:

In 2006, The Government of Karnataka has implemented the Karnataka Gram Swaraj Project in Gram Panchayats of 39 most backward taluks Karnataka Gram Swaraj Project to attain self-sustainability. The project reach will be to 79 blocks in 25 districts of Karnataka. As per the requirement of the Operational Safeguard Policies of the World Bank an Environment Management Framework has been prepared based on the sustainable management of environment. And also give importance to describing the strategy and plan for environmental management. The objective of the EMF is to ensure environmental sustainability of the activities undertaken by Gram Panchayats and to enhance the capacities of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in sustainable management of environment.

DUTY TO CREATE AWARENESS ABOUT THE CONSERVATION OF THE ECOLOGY:

In the Panchayati Raj set up, there are several mechanisms and agencies through which information regarding public good and welfare can be communicated to the villagers. These can be used to create the much-needed awareness about the conservation of the ecology and the environment. All this depends on the lead taken by local bodies, encouragement by the state governments given to local bodies, the honesty and sincerity of the non-officials who administer the local bodies, and corruption-free controlling authorities, these local bodies can also play a part in the prevention and control of pollution in their respective areas. In as much as these local bodies are responsible for approval of layouts and building plans, they can enforce moves for prevention of pollution. Establishment of factories, industries and workshops can be done only with the approval of local bodies. When applicants approach the local bodies for approval, the local bodies should process applications in compliance and enforce strict measures in order to prevent pollution.

POWERS UNDER PANCHAYAT RAJ ACT, 1993:

Section 109 of Panchayat Raj Act 1993, It shall be lawful for a Grama Panchayat to direct by public notice that every furnace employed or to be employed, in any works or buildings used, for the purpose of any trade or manufacture whatsoever, within the limits of the Grama Panchayat, whether a steam engine is or is not used or employed therein, shall in all cases be constructed, supplemented or altered as to consume or burn or reduce as far as may be practicable the smoke arising from such furnace. Under section 106. of Panchayat Raj Act, Grama Panchayat can make Inspection of drains and can take proper action. Section 87 of Panchayat Raj Act, empowers Grama Panchayat to control nuisance from foul water.

The following findings and observations are based on the data, both primary and secondary, collected in connection with the recent larger projects / studies on Karnataka Panchayati Raj System.

- There is a need of Proper co-ordination mechanisms should be devel-

oped between the Zilla Panchayat and the line departments and among the departments in the district.

- The domination by MP, MLA and other state and central legislators is a threat to local decision making,
- Mechanisms to curb corruption should be evolved by having institutions like Ombudsman and Janabandhi (which is in its initial stages). Both should find a place in the Panchayati Raj Act itself in order to make them mandatory.
- The Grama Sabha is the soul of Panchayati Raj and the idea is to progressively strengthen its functioning to ensure full participation of the people and assure accountability and transparency.

CONCLUSIONS:

As a part of the survey, the current status of the GP and TP stakeholders with regard to their capacity to address various environmental issues were assessed using some of the social skill parameters. It was found that on the whole the awareness about environmental concerns were either average or poor. In Gram Panchayats where ever the awareness was present the capacity to identify the impacts or identify the mitigation options was poor. Except for one Gram Panchayat, none of the Gram Panchayats were able to comprehend the best practices adopted by them. In fact the awareness that the Gram Panchayats could also set an example for best practices adopted in environmental sector was not there though there is an average awareness regarding the Panchayat Act and other legal concerns. However, regarding Environmental Acts and other environment relevant legislations, the awareness is practically nil. There was a strong correlation between the environmental awareness of a GP to the economic performance. Where the GP was good in economic performance it also had environmental awareness not withstanding its location or literacy level. The lack of awareness of GP members can be attributed to the absence of training module and training activity on the environmental issues.

SUGGESTIONS:

Though the Karnataka Panchayat Act gives some of the duties of Gram Panchayats for addressing hygiene and sanitary issues and the action (through fines) to be taken it does not address the principles of Integrated Management of the Environment through Preventive Strategies. The Gram Panchayat have taken difference of opinion on mining and thereby weakened the strength against mining activities. Most of the Environmental Acts are industrial activities focussed and address the environmental pollution abatement of industries. Environmental Acts which include issues like integrated pest management, watershed management, livestock management, organic farming, renewable energy, biomass based energy, sustainable agriculture, pesticide and fertilizer usage, capacity of natural systems, etc need to be developed. Also, sustainable land use and use of Natural Resources is lacking in the Karnataka Panchayat Act 1993. Issues of dangerous quarrying have been addressed to the extent of stopping the owners from further quarrying. There is a need to make provisions impose responsibility on officers for non-exercise of powers intentionally.

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